tively nearby low population density regions in centrally located desert or outback regions, inhibited user classes may be pre-determined. Another example would be along the East Coast of the United States, a high population density region. Satellite communication system **10** can initially determine inhibited user classes from cells/antenna footprints that are projected over the land area.

FIG. **7** illustrates acquisition procedure **100** performed by subscriber unit **26** each time when access to system **10** is desired. When a user desires to initiate a communication, the user may initiate a request for service **102**. This may be accomplished by either switching on the subscriber unit or dialing a desired phone number. Task **104** commands subscriber unit **26** to select an antenna beam **35** (FIG. **3**) of satellite **12** with the strongest RF signal. Depending on the type of service requested, subscriber unit **26** may temporarily alter its class identifier according to task **106**. For example, when a subscriber with a class identifier of "15" (see table I) requests emergency service **107**, by dialing 911 for example, the subscriber unit's class identifier may be temporarily changed from "15" to "3". This temporary user class change gives the subscriber unit priority over all other subscriber units with a higher user class identifier. Once an antenna beam **35** is selected, task **108** monitors broadcast channel **18**, and, among other things, receives from satellite **12** the list of user classes currently inhibited in the selected antenna beam **35**. Subscriber unit **26** also receives from satellite **12** information describing which channels have been assigned as acquisition channels. If there are no inhibited class identifiers determined in task **110**, task **112** selects the present antenna beam. If there are inhibited classes, task **114** compares the list of inhibited classes with the user class which has been assigned to the subscriber unit and determines if the subscriber contains one of the inhibited classes. If the subscriber unit is not one of the inhibited classes, task **112** selects the present antenna beam.

If subscriber unit's class is one of the inhibited set of classes, task **116** determines if other antenna beams from satellite **12** are available. Task **116** may base the decision on the adequacy of the signal strength of other antenna beams. If no other antenna beams are available, task **120** displays a message to the user to initiate communications at a later time. Examples of such messages may also include "system busy" messages and "try again later" messages. If other antenna beams are available and can be received by subscriber unit **26**, task **118** selects another available antenna beam from satellite **12**. Tasks **108** through **120** are repeated for each available antenna beam.

Once an antenna beam is finally selected by task **112**, task **122** selects an acquisition channel **19** and initiates an access protocol on the selected acquisition channel. Satellite **12** desirably provides information on what frequencies and/or frequency channels the acquisition channels are located for the particular antenna beam as part of information broadcasted on the broadcast channel associated with that particular antenna beam. In a preferred embodiment, the subscriber unit initiates a Slotted ALOHA protocol on-the selected acquisition channel. Upon successful completion of an access protocol, satellite **12** assigns subscriber unit **26** a traffic channel **17** (if a traffic channel is available) in task **126** on which subscriber unit **26** may then communicate with system **10**.

In a preferred embodiment of procedure **100**, subscriber unit **26** may continually perform tasks **106** through **120** by continually monitoring broadcast channel **18** of antenna beam **35** and inform the user when subscriber unit **26** is inhibited or not inhibited from accessing system **10**.

FIG. **8** illustrates procedure **200** performed by control station **65** (FIG. **5**) suitable for use in a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Desirably, procedure **200** is performed by control station **65** on a regular basis, and is preferably repeated every planning interval. Planning intervals may range from as short as a few seconds to as long as several hours, and are desirably between fifteen seconds and five minutes and preferably about thirty seconds. Task **202** uses historical loading information **204** to determine geographic areas that are likely to exhibit overload. Preferably, task **202** makes this determination for the current planning interval. Historical loading information may be stored in storage medium **62** (FIG. **5**). Task **206** adds geographical areas expected to exhibit overload based on input from a system operator **208**. Such input may include human knowledge of unusual events such as natural disasters, major events (e.g., Olympic games) etc. Task **210** will then determine a proportion of subscriber units in the geographic area expected to exhibit overload, to be blocked from attempting acquisition to system **10**. This determination will desirably use subscriber database information **214** for the particular geographic location.

Task **216** will determine the specific set of class identifiers (see table I) to inhibit during the present planning interval. The selection of class identifiers to inhibit is desirably shared fairly among all subscriber classes over several planning intervals. For example, if it is necessary to inhibit only one user class of regular subscribers, subscribers assigned class identifier "13" would be inhibited one planning interval, then the next planning interval, subscribers assigned class identifier "14" would be inhibited, until all regular subscriber unit classes are inhibited before inhibiting class "13" again.

Task **218** determines the specific satellite **12** (FIG. **2**) and associated antenna beams **35** (FIG. **3**) expected to service the overloaded areas during the planning interval. Task **220** generates a list of inhibited classes to be included with the parameter list for the associated antenna beam. Task **222** sends the list of inhibited user classes to the specific satellite **12** for broadcast in the associated antenna beam **35** during the planning interval. Task **224** desirably waits until the next planning interval to repeat procedure **200**.

FIG. **9** illustrates procedure **300** performed by a communication node (for example, satellite **12** of FIG. **1**) in a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Desirably, procedure **300** is performed once for each planning interval previously discussed. In task **301**, the communication node receives a parameter set from the communication system. The parameter set desirably includes a list of inhibited user classes. In a preferred embodiment, the parameter set is generated, at least in part by procedure **200** (FIG. **8**). Task **302** determines if satellite **12** is in a maintenance mode (e.g., not accepting calls from subscriber units) and if so, task **304** modifies the parameter set to include all user classes except those assigned the user class of system test and maintenance (see Table I). A maintenance mode can be initiated by sending a specific parameter set to satellite **12** by SCS **28**. In a maintenance mode, all users are desirably prohibited from accessing satellite **12**. If satellite **12** is not in a maintenance mode, task **306** determines if antenna beam **35** (FIG. **3**) is scheduled to be turned off. If so, task **308** modifies the parameter set to include all user classes. Preferably, task **306** determines if the antenna beam is scheduled to be turned off within 15 seconds. If the antenna beam is not scheduled for turn off, task **310** determines if the number of available traffic channels is below a predetermined threshold (for example, 10%). If below the threshold, task **312** modifies the